



Emergency Management **UPDATE**

February 2002

CISM teams aid in defusing disaster stress

By Bob Lambert, VDEM Staff Writer

Those who worked the Pentagon crash site Sept. 11 had never seen anything like it — the massive damage, the casualties and the intent behind the devastation.

Fortunately, Arlington County emergency responders were well rehearsed for both the stress and emotional toll of such an event.

Four years ago, the county revamped its Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) program and all members of the fire department go through periodic training, drills and exercises.

Having the program in place well beforehand makes a difference when an incident occurs and in the aftermath.

"The Pentagon is a fine example of how the system works," says Edward P. Plaughter, Arlington fire chief and emergency coordinator.

"Successes are not incident-specific. They are program driven. You have to invest a lot. That's the reality in determining the outcome — how much you invested ahead of time."

The partnerships firefighters build among themselves as they face danger are a key component.

"There must be a high level of trust and respect," Plaughter says. "If you don't build it before the incident, you can't do it on the fly. Using contract, part-time or borrowed counseling services is better than nothing, but I can tell you it's not the way to do it."

"People know we understand their jobs," says Dodie Gill, director of Arlington's employee assistance program. "We ride on calls. We eat in fire stations."

On the day of the Pentagon attack, Gill walked quickly to a nearby fire station.



Caring for their own. Following the Pentagon attack, Arlington County firefighters like these received on scene support and counseling through their jurisdiction's CISM program. Employee Assistance Program Director Dodie Gill set up a 24-hour operation at the site. (FEMA News Photo by Jocelyn Augustino.)

That night, she set up her around-the-clock EAP operation inside the perimeter at the Pentagon.

"We provided support and comfort," Gill says. "Because we knew them, we were able to see who needed us. We didn't lose a single firefighter."

Later on, two employee assistance professionals paired up to debrief the entire fire department in small group sessions that sometimes lasted as long as several hours.

The bonds the advance training established were critical to success. She

calls it "immunizing" employees against the stress and fatigue of an incident.

"We listen with our antennae up and we make follow-up calls," she says. "I'm willing to talk to anybody. That's important."

At the Pentagon, one firefighter was talking to his wife on a cell phone. During the conversation, he turned to Gill and entrusted her to continue talking to his wife. He was comfortable enough to go back to the job at hand.

Gill practices what she preaches. During the deployment, she and her team members also participated in daily debriefings.

For more information about the Arlington County program, contact Ed Plaughter at (703) 228-3355, or by e-mail at eplaug@co.arlington.va.us. Dodie Gill may be reached at (703) 228-8721 or by e-mail at dgill@arlington.k12.va.us.





A friend in need. Linda Damiano's Yorkshire terrier Keelan provides comfort to a child traumatized by the Pentagon tragedy. (Photo by Richard O. Balnicky.)

Therapy dogs bring 'light of day' to Pentagon victims

By Suzanne Simmons, VDEM PAO Reservist

When Sue Peetoom received the phone call from the Therapy Dogs International, Inc. (TDI) headquarters on Sept. 11, she thought her teams would soon be at the Pentagon, providing comfort and companionship for fire and rescue workers.

This was the service TDI therapy dogs provided following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. However, Department of Defense restrictions cast the Fredericksburg-based Spiritkeepers in a much different role. With the Pentagon off limits, the therapy teams were redirected to the Family Assistance Center based in the Sheraton Hotel in Crystal City, Va.

Working with the victims of violent crime was a new role for the Spiritkeepers. The center was a private sanctuary for victims' families, so the teams began their 12-hour shifts at the center with a little apprehension.

"We made a decision not to approach people, because of the stressful events they had experienced. We stationed ourselves at the top and bottom of the stairs, quietly visible and available," says Peetoom, founder of the Fredericksburg TDI chapter.

It didn't take long for the teams to realize they were fulfilling a very great need. Within hours, they were asked to make daily visits to the second floor children's room where they provided quiet companionship — a friend to walk with, talk to, hug or stroke.

Dog handler Linda Damiano enjoys describing what her tiny ribbon-festooned Yorkshire terrier, does best. "She makes people smile. She walks in and faces immediately light up.

"I remember one particularly rough morning when the general [Family Assistance Center Commander, Lt. Gen. John A. Van Alstyne] had a big yellow retriever following him eating cookies right out of his hand. That made everyone smile."

Traditionally therapy teams visit patients and staff in nursing homes, hospitals and other institutions, such as homeless shelters and prisons. (continued on page 4)

Winchester connects with cable access TV

By Rohn Brown, PAO Outreach Coordinator

Educating citizens about public safety can be an ongoing challenge for any locality.

In Winchester, local public access cable is a timely, cost effective and far reaching resource for their fire prevention and life safety program.

Winchester Today, a 30-minute news magazine program broadcast on Winchester Community Television, highlights news from the city, school board and Shenandoah University.

The fire department uses the time to provide education and prevention tips ranging from lightning safety to installing smoke detectors and selecting safe Halloween costumes.

"We continually try to get the word out to the community," said Lynn Miller, Winchester fire and rescue chief and emergency management coordinator. "We look at our public access cable station as a tool to inform the public."

"We want people to say, 'That program on winter preparedness made me take a look at how my vehicle is prepared for a snow storm or I learned something about lightning on your program.'"

Winchester Today is broadcast up to five times a month with new programming every other month. Though it is broadcast by Adelphia Cable, a partnership between the city, the school board and Shenandoah University makes the program a reality.

The university supplies the broadcast studio and production staff. The respective city department supplies the script or outline. Other than staff time, there is no cost to the department.

"Cable access is also more proprietary than regular television news. By writing the script and producing the program, we can dictate what we say and how long we have to say it. It allows us to communicate directly to our audience without interruptions."

Miller notes that using public access may be as easy as making a phone call or a visit to your cable station.

"Any emergency manager with community cable access should talk with management and see if there is a channel dedicated to public access," Miller says. "By sharing resources, the city, university and schools all benefit from the same television program. It is cost effective for all the departments within the partnership.

"It is difficult to gauge prevention. If an event doesn't occur, there is no record. The best judge of the effectiveness may be the comments we receive from the community.

"One of our volunteer stations purchased a new ambulance and it was profiled on the public access station. At 10 p.m. that night, my neighbor knocked on my door just to tell me how impressed he was with the program."

To learn more about using public access television to increase community awareness, contact Lynn Miller at 540-662-2298 or e-mail him at wfrdchieflam@ci.winchester.va.us.



9/11 boosts statewide terrorism training demand

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

As America's war on terrorism continues, emergency managers are seeking additional hazmat training for their own "combat missions."

"We've seen a big increase in regional training requests" says Greg Britt, VDEM hazmat field manager. "Many responders see chemical, biological and nuclear terrorism as hazmat with attitude."

Deputy Chief R.C. Dawson of Henrico County founded the county's hazmat team and manages their specialty units (including hazmat). He says there is a strong need for specialized training because of the threat of terrorist attacks.

"Our regional hazmat team has a lot of expertise responding to industrial chemical accidents or overturned vehicles on the highway," says Dawson.

"We would like to train our frontline first responders in terrorism response and biological and chemical warfare."

Herman Moore, Newport News battalion chief and regional hazmat coordinator, is working with Richard Parker, VDEM Area 3 Hazardous Materials Officer (HMO), to develop other related training for their team.

That extra training translates into increased knowledge of how to test for terrorist weapons of mass destruction. In the past, hazmat officers needed to learn to operate a limited number of instruments.

"Now we have different modes and capabilities," Parker says. "We are also bringing in more medical personnel to assist."



Combat training. Classes like "Public Safety Response to Terrorism - Tactical Considerations" help prepare localities for the war on terrorism. (VDEM Photo by Barbara Bowen.)

From September to December last year, about 150 Richmond metropolitan area team members participated in the terrorism tactical considerations course, says Steve De Lisi, VDEM Area 2 HMO. He says a similar course for the region's fire companies is under consideration.

Closer to five state capitals than its own, Bristol is geographically remote from most of the state. Though it is a regional transportation hub, the nearest full-time career fire department is in Salem, 150 miles away.

That fact worries Fire Chief Richard Steinberg, who heads the regional hazmat team. Well trained in handling industrial and transportation chemical accidents, Bristol is concerned about their ability to identify and respond to exotic biochemical agents on a timely basis.

"We're in a mobile economy," says Steinberg, who spent 32 years of his fire-fighting career in Fairfax. "We have a lot of trucks and buses passing through and stopping every day."

Were a terrorist incident to occur, sophisticated testing technology at the state labs in Richmond is a long way away. Steinberg sees the need for more training and central placement of testing equipment to reduce the critical turnaround time.

The *Emergency Response Guidebook*, the bible for responders, details responses to a wide variety of chemicals, including those that could be used in a terrorist attack. In fact, Britt says the existing foundation of training and experience is a good starting point for teams responding to most chemical-related incidents. (cont'd on page 4)

In the Spotlight



Anthony McLean, former operations supervisor for VDEM's reservist program, has moved to a planning position with our Preparedness and Mitigation Division.



A familiar face during his 12 years in the Virginia Emergency Operations Center, he will now help shape the future of Statewide Mutual Aid and the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

McLean holds a bachelor's degree in emergency management from the University of Richmond and is completing work on a master's degree in public administration from Central Michigan University.



Curt Nellis has rejoined VDEM as a senior training and development coordinator. Prior to a two-year stint as Shenandoah County fire chief, he was the agency's Region II coordinator and an adjunct technical instructor for the Federal Emergency Management Institute.

A certified emergency manager, Nellis was a member of the CEM commission for six years and served two years as chair. In his new position, he will develop training programs for state and local emergency managers.

Local hazmat teams receive education grants

Two Virginia jurisdictions have received special grants from the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) to assist in their training efforts. The fire prevention organization selected Henrico County Hazardous Materials Team for the 2002 Warren E. Isman grant. The \$2,500 award will be used to send hazmat staff to an NFPA conference.

Since no team had been awarded a grant for 2001, the Fire Safety Educational Memorial Fund Committee selected this year's runner-up, Newport News Regional Hazmat Team, for an education grant.

Three team members including Herman Moore, Newport News battalion chief and regional hazmat coordinator, attended a hazmat conference in Baltimore last December. Among the courses on the program was the growing threat of clandestine labs in the eastern part of the country as a result of a crackdown on the West Coast.



Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Decision Making in a Crisis
Feb. 12/Williamsburg

Principles of Emergency Mgmt.
Feb. 26-28/Virginia Beach

Coordinator's Briefing
March 7/Charlottesville

**2002 Virginia Emergency
Management Conference**
March 13-15/Williamsburg

Leadership and Influence
March 19-21/Williamsburg

ISC/EOC Interface
March 26-27/Leesburg

Radiological

Evacuation Assembly Center
Feb. 19/Richmond

EOC Training
March 19/Richmond

Reservist Training

Hazmat Awareness Training
Feb. 21/Roanoke

SERTEX 2002
March 5/Richmond

Nat. Weather Service Interface
March 28/Wakefield

Search and Rescue

GSAR Institute (Part II)
Feb. 8-10/Blue Ridge

CAP GSAR Institute (Part I)
March 22-24/Fort A.P. Hill

Technological Hazards

**A Weekend of Terrorism
Preparedness Training**
Feb. 16-17/Salem
(Roanoke Regional Training Center)

**Public Safety Response to
Terrorism (PSRT) — Hazmat
Team Operations:** Feb. 19/Danville

Chemistry of Hazmat
March 4-15/Virginia Beach

Terrorism Training (continued from page 3)

"The response is pretty much the same as what's being used for hazmat incidents," says Ron Hargrave, technological hazards division training coordinator. "You identify the chemical or biological agents and use the appropriate protocols for dealing with it. When you take the shock out of it, you're basically dealing with a hazmat incident in most cases."

To learn more about training opportunities, contact Pat Collins at pcollins@vdem.state.va.us or (804) 897-6500, ext. 6568, or visit the VDEM Web site (www.vaemergency.com/train/calendar.cfm).

Therapy Dogs (continued from page 2)

In the wake of recent terrorist attacks, therapy dogs are being seen in a new light. TDI teams can provide a brief respite, not only for victims and families, but also for volunteers, and rescue and military personnel on site at high-stress disaster scenes.

"These 4-footed therapists provide something that medical services can't provide without drugs," says Peetoom. "Through petting, touching and talking to the dogs, blood pressure is lowered, stress is relieved and depression is eased."

In all, 42 dogs joined their handlers in responding to the call. They remained on duty for 30 days, providing companionship, comfort and unconditional love to anyone who needed it.

"That's what we were there for, to provide those smiles through the tears," says Peetoom. "In the midst of the horror, we give those few minutes of love or maybe even laughter that allow people to regroup and go on with the task at hand. Sometimes we are the only light in the day."

To learn more, contact Spiritkeepers at (540) 775-5963 or samwist@crosslink.net. Therapy Dogs International, Inc., can be reached at (973) 252-9800 or tdi@gti.net or www.tdi-dog.org.

This month in Virginia storm history

One of Virginia's first recorded tornadoes struck an unspecified town near the lower Rappahannock River on Feb. 10, 1776. It damaged several buildings and killed four sheep and three lambs on a tobacco farm. Near Bramham's mill pond, all the houses were lost and trees were blown down. Hundreds of years later, tornadoes are still a threat to Virginians.

Now is a great time for EMs to finalize plans for the annual tornado drill for 9:45 a.m., March 26. Starting this year, all public schools are required by state law to conduct at least one drill per year. The bill was introduced by the Virginia Emergency Management Association to members of the General Assembly. Schools can participate in the statewide drill or choose a more convenient date. To learn more about the drill or order brochures and other supporting materials, contact Rohn Brown at rbrown@vdem.state.va.us or (804) 897-6500, ext. 6519.



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